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Milwaukee Art Center [Review of recent aquisitions of the Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee]

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By Curtis L. Carter

An impressive array of 1970 acquisitions featured in the current exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Center testify to steady and substantial growth in their permanent collection. This is no small achievement for a collection which, lacking substantial funds for acquisitions and facing soaring prices, relies heavily on collectors' and other benefactors' gifts.

The exhibit contains important works of major 20th century artists Olle Baertling, Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, Laszlo Moholy Nagy, Leonard Baskin, Edmund Lewandowski, Ellsworth Kelly, Harry Bertola, Paul Suttman, Camille Pissarro, Rodin and others.

In the show are etchings of Rembrandt, Delacroix, and Durer; a Japanese woodcut by Katsushika; works of photogravure by Stiechen; and 17th to 19th century Dutch, Spanish, and German paintings.

Olle Baertling's "Oradalki, 1965" exemplifies this contemporary Swedish painter's concept of "open form." As a major innovator in abstract art,

Baertling invented this system of naturalism.

Key elements in "open form" are slightly curved diagonal black lines which give direction to colored angle-spaces lying between heavy lines. Black, the color of the lines, is the color on which Baertling builds art. The spaces between are filled with vibrant flat colors.

Careful experimentation with the sensory impact of the different colors led Baertling to the discovery that "different colors vary in their ability to appear to expand, lift, and vaporize." Using this principle in conjunction with black diagonal lines, Baertling achieves "open form," causing the picture space to explode past the boundaries of the canvas in all directions.

A set of 10 Chagall lithographs, "Sur La Terre Des Dieux, 1967" colorfully portray incidents concerning classical figures such as Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Longus, and Sappho.

Additional graphics range from old masterpieces like Rembrandt's

"Christ and the Woman of Samaria Among Ruins" and Durer's "Madonna With a Pea" to more recent works such as Kelly's "Cyclamen III," a floral lithograph done in memory of Martin Luther King, and Baskin's "The Cry," which portrays a suffering face.

Sculpture is respectably evident. On loan is Rodin's "Walking Man, 1877" a massive figure begun as a study for his John the Baptist. The piece gives off an antique green color cast which somewhat softens the otherwise rough features of the figure.

Thin, hair-like strands of stainless steel mounted and flowing out from a central post order space in a form irresistible to touch, in Harry Bertola's Untitled sculpture.

A pastel, "View of Bazincourt: Fog," by the French impressionist Pissarro enhances the impressionist collection. Likewise the small delicate oil painting, "Jeune Fille (Portrait of Madam Jean)" by Matisse strengthens the post impressionist holdings.

An important work of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "Nuclear II, 1946," stands out prominently in the collection. This work employs compositional principles characteristic of the Bauhaus school in Germany, where Moholy-Nagy worked with other major artists such as Kandinsky and Klee.

Some fine examples of works by minor 17th century Spanish and Dutch painters also appear in this exhibit. Equally noteworthy are some excellent additions to the center's already substantial collection of 19th century German genre paintings.

These works are collectively on exhibit through Sunday, March 28.